DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 273 559 SO 017 542

AUTHOR Hyland, John T.
TITLE Textbooks and the Teaching of Eighth Grade United States History.
PUB DATE 86
NOTE 6p.; Paper presented at the Institute on the Teaching of United States History with a Focus on the Constitution (Los Angeles, CA, August 1986).
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Content Analysis; Course Content; *Grade 8; *Instructional Effectiveness; Junior High Schools; Learning Strategies; Social Studies; Student Role; *Teacher Role; *Teacher Student Relationship; *Textbook Content; Textbook Evaluation; *United States History

ABSTRACT

Textbooks not only transmit key cultural information but also employ a distinctive style and language, and these intrinsic structures maintain the textbook as the official valid knowledge required of the student. The student has a particular view of schooling which conditions the learning process and teaching decisions. The teacher emphasizes specific aspects of the text and establishes goals contingent on student actions. Thus a network of relationships exists between teacher, students and text, and it is within this network that the teacher's decisions are critical to the character of student learning and that decisions assume a meaning beyond the mere choosing of assigned pages, pictures, and questions to answer. (TRS)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED273559

TEXTBOOKS AND THE TEACHING OF EIGHTH GRADE UNITED STATES HISTORY

by John T. Hyland

Region G

Los Angeles City Unified School District

This paper was presented during the Institute on the Teaching of United States History With a Focus on the Constitution, August 1986. This institute was sponsored by California State University of Los Angeles, Region G of the Los Angeles City Unified School District and The National Endowment for the Humanities.

SP017542

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

John T. Hyland

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Discussion on textbooks & the teaching of 8th grade
United States history

John Hyland

The Importance of Textbooks

Textbooks are used in one fashion or another by nearly all teachers. Other materials are also used by some teachers. The materials which are used contain the text of the unit of study on the Constitution. As part of the text of the unit of study, the materials constitute one source of knowledge and ideas considered legitimate and appropriate for the study of the Constitution.

Olson (1983) argues that the text provides "a body of knowledge or procedures, a sacred tradition, ..." which provides the foundation for instruction (p.128). The text, **as presented in the written form of the textbook**, is a form of ritualized speech and provides a means of "putting ideas and beliefs above criticism." As far as schools are concerned, valid knowledge is contained in the materials, usually textbooks; the classroom textbook embodies the "authorized version of society's valid knowledge." The textbook is a "fixed locus within the schooling system from which the means and ends of instruction are derived" (Luke, DeCastell & Luke, 1983, p.112).

Anyon (1979) has concluded, on the basis of her study of United States history textbooks that textbooks constitute "one way of imposing beliefs and constraining choice" (p.383). The textbook or other classroom material, provides the grounds for the legitimacy of ideas. It contributes to the acceptance or rejection, the utilization and approval by the student of knowledge, values, and ideas.

Anyon further notes that "if the views embedded in the information disseminated by these agencies [such as schools] predispose people to accept some values, and not others, support some group's activities and not others, and exclude some choices as unacceptable, then they provide invisible intellectual, internalized, and perhaps unconscious boundaries to social choice..." (p. 383). Since the textbook makes public and presents as an accepted norm, the approved ideology students are constrained in their opportunities to challenge and seek alternatives. They are a captive audience, required to attend to the textbook which they have had selected for them and the mark of achievement towards which the students are

socialized to strive is measured according to their mastery of that textbook.

One argument, then, set forth by Olson and supported by the work of Anyon, is that the text, usually in the format of a textbook, transmits key cultural information. Textbooks employ distinctive language as well a stress on definition of key words and **"an emphasis on complete and unmarked grammatical forms, typically well-formed declarative sentences,"** and other structures which are intrinsic to the textbook. These intrinsic structures maintain the textbook or other materials as the official valid knowledge the students are required to learn.

The importance of the teacher

However, Luke, DeCastell, & Luke argue that this view of the centrality of the text is, though noteworthy, deficient because of a neglect of the external social context which bears on the way in which the text is mediated and thus understood. "How and what the student learns from the text is highly dependent on the specific manner in which the text is taught; instructional practices delimit the pragmatic context within which the text is read and interpreted" (p. 117).

The text is conveyed within the boundaries of the classroom and factors which are external to the text influence the authority of the text. The student gains something from the teacher as well as the text, **"it is from teachers that students acquire not only a corpus of knowledge and skills but also an attitude towards learning- in literary terms, a 'sensibility' towards the text"** (p. 118).

Further, **the student is at the will of the teacher when it comes to access to the text** [This is particularly the case if students speak a different primary language or dialect]. The student engages the text dependent on the instructional decisions of the teacher. In a study of teacher thinking, Elbaz (1983) has suggested that teaching embodies a practical knowledge oriented to the situation and involving personal, social, and experiential knowledge (Pp. 13-22). Teachers have an authoritative status in the classroom and are able to emphasize various aspects of the text as they wish. Yet the teacher is not expert in every aspect of the text, particularly in a course like United States History. **Thus teachers have control "over the text" but the teachers are not knowledgeable about all aspects of the text, they are not authorities "on the text."** (Luke, DeCastell, Luke, 1983, p.123). Teachers generally control the

text by virtue of their institutionalized position, but not by virtue of their scholarship.

Teachers are not omnipotent in this matter. The students are not entirely without influence over the text. **The text which will actually be experienced by the students during the course of instruction depends in part on the students' willingness and capacity to attend to the text**. The student has a particular view of schooling which conditions the learning process and teaching decisions. The teacher may manage the text but that management process is very much contingent on the behavior of the student. The teacher interprets the actions of the students, perhaps in the light of prior experiences, and establishes text goals for the students.

There is then, a network of relationships existing between the teacher, students, and the text. It is in that network of relationships that the teachers' decisions are critical to the character of the students' learning. Viewed from this perspective, these teachers' actions take on a poignancy and meaning beyond the mere choosing of pages to read, pictures to view, and questions to answer.

References

Anyon, J. (1979). Ideology and United States History Textbooks. Harvard Educational Review, 49, 361-386.

Elbaz, F. (1983) The Teacher's "Practical Knowledge": Report of a Case Study. Curriculum Inquiry, 11, 43-71.

Luke, C., De Castell, & Luke, A. (1983). Beyond Criticism: The Authority of the School Text. Curriculum Inquiry, 13, 111-127.

Olson, D. (1983). Sources of Authority in the Language of the School: A Response to "Beyond Criticism". Curriculum Inquiry, 13, 128-129.

Federalism,
an exercise on textbook evaluation*

Checklist for textbook evaluation.

Directions: Read the textbook selection and rate the selection on the following factors. If it meets the criteria rate it a **one(1)** in the Yes column. If it does not meet the criteria rate it a **zero(0)** in the No column.

	Yes	No
1. Does the text explicitly use the name of the concept?	___	___
2. Does the textbook explicitly define the concept?	___	___
3. Is there a clear identification of the critical feature of the concept?	___	___
4. Are there clear examples of the concept?	___	___
5. Are there clear non-examples of the concept?	___	___
6. Does the textbook clearly link the concept to the Constitution by reference to an article or clause of the Constitution?	___	___
7. Does the textbook make clear that this concept of Federalism has a unique meaning which emerged out of the United States experience?	___	___
8. Does the textbook compare and contrast this concept with other nations (eg. Canada, Switzerland)?	___	___
Total	___	___

*** J. Hyland 8/86**